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What the leaders of the two nuclear superpowers did in the Caribbean in the fall of 1962 has been known ever since the days of the Cuban Missile Crisis. But why they did it was mysterious then, and in many ways it remains a mystery now.

What was each of them trying to achieve, or to avert? What mattered most, and why did it matter so much? What were their strategies for achieving their goals? How likely did they think they were to succeed, and what made them think that? What did they think they were risking by what they were doing, and why were they willing to risk that?

It did not seem easy to believe fully what either of the leaders was saying publicly at the time about these matters; yet it has never been any easier to come up with different, more plausible explanations. In the eyes of large, different but overlapping numbers of people, each leader seemed to have gone crazy.

That is an unsatisfying conclusion about two leaders entrusted with the command of nuclear weapons: frightening if true, but implausible. Different answers--or at any rate, more confident answers--seemed highly desirable, and still do:

Then, in the height of the crisis, to guess what was likely to follow from different courses, to judge the risk for the citizens of the two nations and for the world, to decide what this global mass of interested parties might suggest or do to help guard their own safety.

Now, to help understand from this example how rivalrous pairs of nuclear-armed states--in a world where such pairs are proliferating--can come close to major, potentially escalating armed combat; and how to avert the risks this possibility poses for all their people, and for life on earth.

To be sure, there are now serious scholars of the crisis--as there have been at every point in the past--who believe with some confidence that with the latest information available they have adequately satisfactory answers to most or all of these questions. On many of these points many of them agree with each other; there is what amounts to a consensus.

But with the help of previously-hidden data these students have not been able to take into account it is possible to demonstrate that every one of these most recently published conclusions is in important respects mistaken. That is what I will argue in this report of work-in-progress, a discussion of the state-of-the-questions: drawing both on crucial new revelations

over the last three years, some as recent as this summer, and on hitherto-unrevealed data known to me since 1962 or 1964 but never previously disclosed in print.

This is still a "preliminary" report on an investigation that has now lasted, for me, almost thirty years. I do believe that some of my oldest hypotheses have stood up long enough--and some of my newest ones now have enough evidence behind them--to be worthy guides to further research, and to suggest some highly useful rules of thumb for better understanding the policy roads ahead.

To express more confidence than that in the finality of my answers at this point would seem, to me, to make the same mistake I have found, over the years, in nearly every other investigation of this episode: premature closure, an unfounded belief that the latest word is "the last word," and that information still to come will only alter or fill in details. The reality has been that nearly every major revelation has put, or should have put every previous conclusion into question, and has opened major new questions.

At the rate these revelations have been coming over the last three years, there is no reason at all to suppose that this process is almost over. After thirty years, we are somewhere in the middle of our efforts adequately to understand this drama: not, any longer, still at the beginning, but nowhere near the end.

Just why this is so, why the puzzles have been so recalcitrant, are questions themselves that deserve more attention than they have received. I propose to throw some light on some very dark corners of the governmental decision-making process: the secrecy system itself, and its bearing on the historiography and indeed, the epistemology of crises like this one, and the risks they pose.